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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000765

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MARCH 30 BEATING OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST
MIKAEL DANIELYAN

REF: Golos Armenii Article, 30 March 2004

1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat accordingly.

2. (SBU) Well-known human rights activist Mikael Danielyan contacted the Embassy March 30 after reportedly being beaten by four unidentified men near the entrance of his home in central Yerevan. Danielyan said the men attacked him from behind when he returned from shopping at a neighborhood store. We met with Danielyan hours after the reported incident and observed several visible bruises, a large cut on his face and evidence of bleeding elsewhere. Doctors placed Danielyan in the neurological unit of Yerevan's Republican hospital for observation after he sustained what was described as a "possible mild concussion." Danielyan said the attackers did not take his money, jewelry or recently purchased groceries.

3. (SBU) Danielyan said that GOAM authorities responded to his complaints and took his police report from the hospital. In addition, representatives from the office of newly-appointed Human Rights Ombudsman Larissa Alaverdian met with Danielyan immediately following the incident. According to Danielyan's wife, Armenia's "Kentron" television station interviewed neighbors and identified a handful of witnesses who agreed to make on-the-record statements about the incident in a television spot which would be aired the evening of March 30.

4. (SBU) Danielyan claimed that his attackers did not speak to him during the incident but nonetheless he characterized the event as a "definite warning." Danielyan told us that he believes that the incident was a reaction to his March 27 interview with Azerbaijan's "Echo" newspaper. (Note: During the interview in question, Danielyan postulated that local Armenian authorities were so threatened by the planned rallies of opposition leaders that they were willing to escalate military operations connected to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to divert public attention and transport significant numbers of young people away from the capital city. End Note.)

COMMENT

5. (SBU) No stranger to controversy and frequently a figure at the center of a number of high-profile human rights cases, Danielyan's recent comments to Azerbaijan's "Echo" newspaper have attracted uncharacteristically volatile attention from local Armenian media over the past three days. The influential and widely-read Russian-language bi-weekly "Golos Armenii" ("Voice of Armenia") ran a front-page article March 30 saying his remarks were unpatriotic and that Danielyan's sympathies lay with the Azeris (ref). While we have no information regarding what group or groups were behind his beating, there is no shortage of groups that might take offense at his comments as reported.

WALKER